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SUBJECT: CHAD: LAST-DITCH UN EFFORT ON ELECTIONS FAILS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Midnight March 24, the deadline for candidates to announce themselves for the May 3 presidential election, passed with only five candidates being announced: President Deby and four of his allies. The significant political opposition held fast to its boycott, despite reported inducements from Deby. UNDP Resrep brokered a last-ditch attempt to break the boycott and get the government to make concessions on electoral reform. It was a total failure. The opposition coalition CPDC on March 25 called on its supporters to use every means to ensure that the election not take place. End Summary.

The Desperate Effort

¶2. (SBU) Kingsley Amaning, Resident Coordinator of the UN System (Ghana), called on Ambassador Wall March 23 to review his frantic efforts over the preceding weeks to preserve a democratic figleaf for the May 3 election. He had met key ministers including the Minister of Territorial Administration, the Secretary General of the ruling party MPS, French Ambassador Bercot, and key opposition figures, with the objective of having the government commit to electoral reform and the opposition participate in the election. The deadline for his efforts was midnight on the next day, since that was the official cut-off for announcement of presidential candidacies. Amaning regretted that the coup plot of March 14, the battle in the East March 20, and the panic in the streets on March 22 had combined to make his endeavor even more difficult. However, he continued to believe it was necessary for him to make the effort, since even at so late an hour and under such straitened circumstances it was theoretically possible to take concrete steps to help the May 3 election and thereby set in motion a process that could improve the ensuing communal and legislative elections.

¶3. (SBU) Amaning said that the Secretary General's special representative in the region, General Lamine Cisse (Senegal), was arriving later that day in Ndjamena and would preside over a government-opposition meeting the next day, if it

could be scheduled. Amaning said he would try to see the Prime Minister, expected to get the latter's approval for and participation in the meeting, believed that leading maverick oppositionist Yorongar would attend, and hoped that the other leading oppositionists, grouped in the coalition CPDC, might also attend. However, he was not optimistic about the results, even if the meeting were to occur. The government was unwilling to commit to significant reforms. Yorongar was becoming more determined rather than less so. The leaders in the CPDC said there was no way to salvage the election as constituted. Meanwhile, Salibou Garba of the CPDC had told Amaning that the government had approached several members of the CPDC to try to buy them off. French Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot had told Amaning that CPDC leaders Kamougue and Kebzabo would be bought off by Deby and would announce their candidacy. For Amaning, the worst result, worse than boycott, would be a fraudulent election with some of the most prominent oppositionists paid to participate.

The Pitiful Meeting

¶4. (SBU) Amaning informed the French and American Ambassadors and German and EU Charges March 24 that the meeting would take place under the aegis of the Prime Minister but without the CPDC. He convoked the diplomats for a pre-meeting, to introduce General Cisse. Cisse told the diplomats that Secretary General Annan had asked him to come to Chad to do whatever could be done to save the electoral process. Cisse said he was focused on the most fragile state in the region, Central African Republic, but he was following Chad and had attended the Chad-Sudan reconciliation meeting in Tripoli in February. French Ambassador Bercot spoke at some length. The political process in Chad, according to Bercot, was totally blocked. The abyss between the President and opposition was growing wider and deeper. It was too late now to do anything to help the presidential election, but it was important for the international community to do something about the legislative elections next year. It was time, Bercot continued, for the people of southern Chad to retake the leadership of the country, but Southern oppositionists had wasted time competing among themselves and, now that there was a rift among the Zaghawa ruling clan, the opposition leaders were foolishly emboldened to greater stubbornness. Bercot emphasized the low quality of the opposition parties, noting, in particular, their inability to send observers to voting booths outside their own ethnic areas. He said it was necessary to avoid a power vacuum, whether by force of arms or constitutional void, as such a vacuum would present France and the international community with uncontrollable instability in Chad.

¶5. (SBU) The following two-and-a-half hour meeting took place at a long table at the Foreign Ministry. Prime Minister Pascal Yoadimnadjji sat at one end with General Cisse, Amaning, a gaggle of ministers, and the diplomats, while half the seats at the other end were empty (for the CPDC) and half were occupied by Ngarlejy Yorongar and members of his party (FAR). The ensuing slanging match between two Southerners, the Prime Minister from Doba and Yorongar from Bebedjia (20 miles away from Doba in the heart of the oil-producing zone), was an irony lost on no one.

¶6. (SBU) Cisse opened with congratulations for the government and opposition on this beginning of a dialogue, observing that the simple fact of the physical presence of government and opposition around a table was half the battle. Prime Minister Yoadimnadjji opened, inauspiciously, with regrets at the absence of the CPDC and his appraisal that there was little room for maneuver in regard to the May 3 election. He said that the government had always been open to discussion with the opposition, this discussion was very late in the day, but any discussion was better late than never. Yorongar opened still less auspiciously, with a lengthy historical review of the government's manipulation of the presidential and legislative elections of 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, and the referendum of 2005. Yorongar said that

the CPDC's absence was, in part, due to the government's last-minute refusal to allow it to proceed with a mass rally the following day. He said that the opposition had repeatedly asked the President for a national dialogue and had repeatedly presented to the President the minimum requirements for ensuring that future elections would not be defrauded. Yoadimnadj, irritated, responded that his government had twice asked to meet the opposition and received no response. He said that the opposition's claims of having the "true statistics" of past elections were not to be credited, since none of the opposition parties had the capability to put observers in any but a fraction of voting booths nationwide. He said there was no point continuing the meeting if Yorongar's purpose was hurling insults rather than making concrete and realistic proposals.

17. (SBU) Yorongar said he was happy to present yet again the concrete proposals that he and other members of the opposition had repeatedly put forward as essential to cleansing the electoral process. He went through them: a new electoral commission with 50-percent representation from the opposition and with representatives of the international community as observers; a new census to register voters; a single, nonfalsifiable attestation of results at every voting booth, rather than two documents (one signed by officials and observers, another not signed but used as the official result); a single ballot; voting by nomads only on a single day, not four days as now permitted; suppression of voting by Chadians abroad (especially in Sudan where fraud had been rampant); a reconstituted constitutional court, with international observers; rapid and free radio promulgation of voting results; and ensuring the cell phone network remained open on election day. (Note: A UN report released in November agreed with most of these recommendations, concluding in particular that the national institutions responsible for managing elections lacked independence and that the most recent electoral census was not credible. End Note.) Yorongar added that it was necessary to delay the presidential election by at least 3-6 months to effect the necessary changes.

18. (SBU) Yoadimnadj said, in response, that he did not see anything realistic in Yorongar's proposals. He read from the law covering the electoral commission, claiming that it ensured an equitable balance between ruling party, opposition, and independent members. He claimed that the two voting documents always contained the same information, one being merely a summary of the other. He said that the opposition was asking the government to tamper with laws at the eleventh hour, but the government could not accept a juridical void, nor were laws to be lightly altered. Cisse and Amaning urged the prime minister and Yorongar to look for areas where modifications might be possible without touching the constitution -- Cisse noting in particular the voting documents as one vital step in the electoral process that could be fixed without requiring legal modifications, Amaning noting that elections could be organized so that voting nationwide could be more closely and systematically observed.

Yoadimnadj responded that he did not see any such possibilities. The voting documents were prescribed by law. As for observers at booths, it was not for the government or ruling party to try to hire observers for the opposition parties, if they were too ineffective to produce their own. Yorongar commented that the government had never had a problem changing laws whenever it suited it. As for the lateness of the hour for dialogue, Yorongar said he had delivered his points to the President already in 2000 and again in 2003, and the CPDC had made similar points in a meeting with the President in September 2005. To none of these overtures had the President made a response. Yoadimnadj said it was essential to make reasonable propositions and in a timely fashion, nor could the opposition insist on seeing the President. Yorongar said that it was essential to see, and have a response directly from, the President. Yoadimnadj concluded the meeting with

the observation that the opposition in Chad unfortunately seemed to like boycotts but that boycotts were not the

correct way to proceed in a democracy.

And There Were Only Four

¶9. (SBU) The midnight hour passed and March 25 dawned without Yorongar or any of the CPDC members (not even the least significant and most impecunious of the twenty-odd members of the CPDC) announcing for the May 3 election. Salibou Garba told us March 25 that he had been personally approached by Daoussa, Deby's older half-brother, with the offer of a "suitcase" full of money to put his name in as a candidate, and a similar approach had been made to Kamougue, Kebzabo, and Lol Mahamat Choua, as well as to a number of lesser oppositionists. Kamougue and Kebzabo had both made themselves scarce (Kamougue in the South, Kebzabo in Mali) -- whether to get away from advances from the regime or whether to distance themselves from the CPDC, or both, was not clear at this juncture to Salibou.

¶10. (SBU) The four candidates, in addition to Deby, who announced themselves before the deadline were:

-- Delwa Kassire Coumakoye, the only one of the four with a significant following. His party (Vive-RNDP) is officially allied with the MPS and has two minister-level members in the government and five members of parliament. Opportunistic and bombastic, Kassire was prime minister during the period 1993-95, just before the constitution was put in place and the first presidential election held.

-- Albert Pahimi Padacke, a serving minister (Agriculture). Follower of Kassire until 1996 when he broke off and formed his own party (RNDT), with one member of parliament. He has proved useful to the ruling MPS, drawing off some voters in the Mayo Kebbi region from Saleh Kebzabo.

-- Mahamat Abdoulaye, a serving deputy minister (Decentralization). His party (MPDT) has one member of parliament. He was a presidential candidate in 1996, placing eleventh among fifteen candidates, and has since held several ministerial posts.

-- Brahim Koulamallah, from a well-known Ndjamenan family but not a significant political figure himself. Son of Ahmed Koulamallah, a powerful political figure during the period leading up to independence and prime minister in 1959. Ahmed's sons Brahim and Abderahman each have tiny political parties of their own with no representation in parliament.

Use Every Means to Obstruct the Election

¶11. (SBU) The government changed its mind and the CPDC went ahead with its mass rally in Ndjamenan March 25 at the largest hall in the country, Palais de 15 Janvier. According to Salibou Garba, the hall was packed. Saleh Kebzabo was due to give the principal address, but in his absence, Lol Mahamat Choua delivered it. Most notable was its call for active obstruction of the May 3 election. Key portions of the speech:

-- "To obtain the participation of the political parties who are members of the CPDC in this election, good sense requires the suspension of the process, dissolution of the organs put in place.... Discussion must take place among the actors with parity of representation and not in the midst of confusion.... (Specifically):

-- -- Complete redoing of the electoral census by credible institutions, to create a secure document (of voting results);
-- -- Redefinition of a new organ for managing elections with parity of representation, a new electoral commission with prerogatives that take into account actual experience;
-- -- Cleaning up of the electoral code to guarantee equality among candidates and better to ensure that citizens' votes

are recorded;

-- -- Putting in place proper mechanisms in the electoral code, particularly to ensure control and sanctions.

-- In the absence of such a debate leading to consensual solutions, no one can constrain us to participate in a pretense of an election, not even the Ambassador of the French Republic.

-- For some time, the Ambassador of France, who has distinguished himself since his arrival by his contempt for the democratic opposition, his systematic denigration of the independent civil society, and by the diabolization of the press not allied to the regime, has been extremely active in dragging the European Union and the entire international community into the flagrant and grotesque support he gives the dying regime of President Deby.....

-- We solemnly request the French government and people, President Jacques Chirac in particular, whom I have had the pleasure and honor of knowing personally, to appreciate the consequences of the activism of the present Ambassador of France who risks dragging France into a trap, a bloody quagmire....

-- We ask you, dear militants and dear compatriots, to mobilize yourselves to obstruct this headlong rush (toward elections) and thereby impose a national dialogue that will permit us to define a new transition through which we will reconcile and bring together Chadians and reconstruct the state which is now in advanced decline....

-- You must use all means, in particular the pertinent provisions in our constitution, which authorize you to oppose every attempt at conquest, exercise, and preservation of power by fraudulent means and violence. The organization of fraudulent elections fits the category of such prohibited methods.

-- In any case, the elections announced for May 3 will not take place. They must not take place. You must contribute actively so that it shall be so."

WALL